Fowl Feathered Review
№ 200

Issue 200: The Paradox of the Möbius Monkey: Infinite Jokes in a Twisted Loop

Fowl Feathered Review is a quarterly, a disordered artifact of the human impulse to categorize and consume the ephemeral. Produced by the Springwound Mammoth Pancake Coalition—an entity distinct from its waffle-centric counterpart—it is birthed under the Fowlpox Press imprint. Virgil Kay, its editor, presides over this enterprise from a paper canoe adrift on the Passagassawakeag, a river of dubious depth and even more dubious inhabitants. Surrounded by featherheads and their aquatic card games, Kay's reign is absolute, his word the final arbiter in the transformation of boastful souls into doormats. Layout and visual conceits are the province of Cookie Granola, while melodrama and histrionics fall under the purview of Childe Harold. Silent Bill, in his characteristically taciturn manner, provides necessary pauses. The review's structural integrity, or lack thereof, is the domain of Unkie Bob, whose talents extend to the mitigation of typographical errors and the prevention of electrical conflagrations. Everett Enótita serves as Kay's indispensable amanuensis, and the Ecum Secum Literary Brain Trust, in a gesture of dubious beneficence, offers nominal financial support. Printed upon the verdant expanse of Bald Porcupine Island, and laced with the enigmatic Kraa, a bioengineered culinary enigma, the Fowl Feathered Review remains a testament to human ingenuity, or perhaps merely a symptom of cultural decline. ISSN: 1929-7238.

"I am an observer of life, a non-participant who takes no sides. I am in the regimented society, but not of it."
--Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue

Return Policy:
If this magazine does not meet your expectations,
please return it to us in its original condition
for a full refund, minus the cost of enlightenment.

Submissions

Fowlpox Press: A Submission Guide for the Determined (or Deluded)
To the Aspiring Artist (or Sandwich Enthusiast):

1. **Craft** (or **Culinary Construct**): 2-227 poems, a numerical range that hints at both ambition and a troubling lack of self-editing, may find their way to our digital doorstep (fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com). Alternatively, for the visually inclined, paintings numbered 2-953 (a prolific career, or perhaps a basement overflowing with forgotten canvases?) are welcome. We are also, inexplicably, open to submissions of twelve-inch sandwiches.
2. **The Gatekeeper:** Address your offerings to Virgil Kay, Editor. In posession of remarkably discerning taste, or so he believes, Virgil is a rooster of some renown, a creature of instinct and inexplicable confidence. His title, "China Wok Habitue," suggests a broader palate than one might expect from a bird, though it's more likely a testament to the local takeout joint's generous portions. (**Please note:** Include a bio, a desperate plea for recognition that will likely join the unread masses in the digital purgatory of our slush pile.)
3. **Format:** Poems, those valiant attempts at capturing the human experience in meter and rhyme, should be attached in a Word document or PDF. Paintings, windows into your soul (or a weekend spent with Bob Ross reruns), must be submitted in JPEG, TIFF, or a format our aging technology can comprehend. Jokes, if they exist, should be delivered in MP3 format. We are, alas, not equipped to handle the nuanced art of the live performance. Sandwiches, a curious offering in the realm of artistic expression, require clear plastic wrapping and a small packet of Kewpie Mayonnaise. (**Pro-tip:** The Kewpie packaging is, undeniably, a work of art in its own right, and we encourage you to admire it before consumption.)
4. **The Cycle Continues:** We exist in a perpetual state of acceptance and rejection. A Sisyphean task, some might say. We receive submissions 365 days a year, a testament to the relentless hope, or perhaps blissful ignorance, of aspiring artists. However, with a heavy heart (and a full crop), we must inform you that rejections also occur 365 days a year.
5. **The Sandwiches:** Ah, the sandwiches. These, unlike your artistic endeavors, find a permanent home within our editorial sanctum. Virgil, in his infinite wisdom, has determined that a diet rich in carbohydrates is essential for maintaining his regal demeanor.
6. **Leap Year Follies:** Leap years, those extra days gifted by the whims of the calendar, offer no reprieve. Aspiring poets, it seems, are undeterred by such temporal anomalies. You are, however, cordially invited to "take a flying leap" during these additional 24 hours.

Please proceed with caution. Artistic aspirations are a delicate dance, and the path to publication is littered with the fallen hopes of countless dreamers. But hey, maybe your sandwich is killer. Just remember, Kewpie or bust.

Fowl Feathered Review | Poets & Writers (pw.org)

"Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco."

— Virgil, The Aeneid

Tuxedos for a Podcast in a Drowned Season

By Dominic Carpenter

A fugue state of perpetual sartorial dissent, this was the condition of Canned Lemon, proprietor of a tuxedo concern that functioned primarily as a depot for his own profound distaste for formal menswear. The business, such as it was, bled out slowly, a quiet exsanguination in a strip mall that smelled of wet asphalt and regret. He was a haberdasher of the void, a man whose inventory was an affront to his very soul. He much preferred the flowing architecture of the Kaftan, the priestly anonymity of it, capped by the absurd thuggery of a football helmet–a Riddell VSR4 one moment, a Schutt Air Advantage the next, the plastic shells changed with the listless cadence of a guard at a forgotten tomb.

"We have a size 38 tux right now," he would announce to the spectral outline of a potential customer, his voice muffled as a saffron Kaftan descended over his head, a brief, holy eclipse. "Though I must, in all conscience, suggest this. Sourced from a rather reputable outfit, a digital souk of sorts on the Amazon."

His past was a similarly misaligned archive, a history curated by his 11th great grandmother, a woman yanked from the tar pit of chronology, her presence as mundane and impossible as a talking samovar. He'd been fond of her, and had, in an act of gentle filial revisionism, persuaded her to abandon the clay pipe and its acrid plume for a simple bubble pipe. The result was a constant, silent effervescence, an outpouring of iridescent nihilism that caught the light and popped with a sound like dying whispers. She rocked. Endlessly. A human metronome swaddled in a tight bonnet, keeping time for an age that had lost its rhythm.

And the rhythm, the rhyme–that was the business of tonight. Tonight was Podcast night.

Which was to say it was manuscript illumination night, a modern iteration of the palimpsest, a devotional act of scholastic clutter performed on the cheap parchment of digital audio files. Canned Lemon's monologues—recorded in the back room amidst the ghosts of unclaimed cummerbunds—were the matn, the central text, a sprawling, grandiloquent core treatise on, say, the migratory patterns of misplaced keys or the existential weight of a 7-Eleven chili dog. This core was then dispatched into the digital wilderness, a message in a bottle cast into a sea of noise.

And the margins would answer.

The file would arrive, a raw slab of sonic data, on the servers and devices of his collaborators, his far-flung scribes, who would then begin their sacred work of annotation, of defilement, of glorious intellectual pollution. Their contributions were the hashiya and the sharh, the glosses and commentaries running in diagonal, circular, and spiraling vectors of thought, not in linear flow but following the available space, the silences between his words, the very grain of the digital silence itself.

It was a manuscript as a living document, a dialogue not across time but through it, a chaotic assemblage that a trained listener could navigate like a city. You could almost see the layout:

CENTRAL TEXT (Canned Lemon): ...and so the memory of the thing becomes a thing itself, a solid object you can trip over in the hallway of your own mind, a hatbox full of fog...

MARGINALIA (A Scholar of Late-Antiquity Semiotics, slowing the tape to 0.75x speed): A rather clumsy deployment of the Patristic mnemonic fallacy. He conflates the Platonic eikon with the Augustinian vestigium. One must be precise. The hallway is not the mind; it is merely the lobby.

INTERLINEAR GLOSS (A messed-up fink from a coastal town, adding a sample of seagulls and a faint, distorted recording of a numbers station): 1-6-5-5-9... the gulls know... they know about the hatbox...

ORNAMENTAL CALLIGRAPHY (An artist who works exclusively in the medium of fermented cabbage): A low, bubbling hum, a sound like tectonic plates shifting beneath a bed of kimchi, is layered under the word “fog,” giving it a texture of damp soil and sour effervescence.

SUB-MARGINALIA (The Sheriff, his voice a low rumble over the jingle of an inordinate amount of pocket change): Lipstick balm. You need it for the chapping. Out here the wind just takes the moisture right off you. He’s right about the memory, though. It gets stuck in your teeth.

This organic process, this growth of knowledge or perhaps its opposite, a cultivation of sublime misunderstanding, was a defiance of the clean, printed page. It was an economy of psychic space. Scholars used every inch of the parchment because parchment was expensive; Canned Lemon’s krewe used every microsecond of the .wav file because silence was a terrifying vacuum. They would speed him up into a frantic, chipmunk squeal or slow him down into a glacial, syrupy drawl, warping the text, bending it around their own obsessions until the original authorial intent was a forgotten ruin.

It was a beautiful, layered chaos. The final artifact, once assembled, was less a podcast and more a core sample drilled from the addled crust of the age: a remonstrative constabulary of ancient voices arguing in the margins of a story about a tuxedo salesman who hated tuxedos, his ancient grandmother blowing silent, shimmering bubbles into the stale air, each one a perfect, transient world, popping, unheard, in the ceaseless, rocking dark.

OF HARMONY AND CHOCOLATE

By Jolene Matthews

In the ceaseless, suffocating air of human aspiration, where the monumental carving of permanence—a kind of desperate, futile gesture—collides with the primordial chaos of instinct and the inexorable, creeping corrosion of entropy, one finds a figure that embodies this absurd paradox with a clarity so stark it is almost a slap: a moose, not of flesh and blood and the wild forest, but a monumental sculpture of the sweetest, most decadent milk chocolate, standing silent and unmoving behind a weathered, insignificant wooden fence in Scarborough, Maine. This figure, this Lenny, is not merely a roadside attraction; he is a symbol, a suffocating, immovable artifact of human obsession with stasis, a confectionary monument to our frantic, relentless quest to arrest time itself, to preserve some fleeting moment of sweetness against the relentless decay that gnaws at everything, from the molecular order of the world to the vast, cold emptiness of the metaphysical, his feet sinking into a pond of white chocolate dyed a sickly, chemical blue, his temperature held sacrosanct at a delicate seventy degrees, a fragile, trembling barrier of thermodynamic defiance, a tiny fortress resisting the inevitable, horrifying slide into entropy, even as the world around him sways and shifts in the relentless, indifferent flux of existence. Here, in the suffocating stillness of this sugary idol, we witness the primal, pathetic human urge to build monuments—whether of stone or chocolate or the fragile, treacherous substance of memory—a testament to our desire to impose meaning and permanence upon an inherently, terrifyingly impermanent universe, to carve out islands of certainty in the tumultuous, churning sea of change, a desire that is, in the end, nothing more than a wish, a gasp.

And yet, beyond this tableau of frozen sweetness, in the sprawling, interconnected, and ultimately meaningless network of human thought and endeavor, a different structure begins to emerge, not of static, sweet material but of intangible, fluid, and ultimately ungraspable knowledge, a construct as elusive as a shadow and as unwieldy as a collapsing building, a restless current that flows through the desiccated veins of organizations, created and captured and applied in an endless, frantic attempt to tame the chaos of human existence, a system that, like the moose, seeks to resist entropy, but of a different, more abstract kind—an intricate, labyrinthine web of diagrams and lists and

bureaucratic obstacles that, despite their complexity, are ultimately fragile, susceptible to the corrosive, acidic effects of distrust, of the fear of losing some insignificant scrap of power, of the withering disinterest of those wielding authority, a desperate dance to categorize and control the uncontainable, to impose order on the primal, instinctual knowledge that exists beyond systems, beyond language, beyond the very structures that attempt to define it, a tension that reveals the profound, heartbreaking contradiction at the very core of our pursuits: that our greatest systems are but flimsy, fragile masks, temporary scaffolds erected over the abyss of the unknowable, a temporary quiet before the final, crushing silence.

And then, amidst this unbearable chaos of monuments and systems, there echoes a voice, spectral and defiant, that speaks of a people unbound by the chains of law, of authority, of the abstract principles that govern our suffocating world. They are described as rejecting the tyranny of rules, living in a harmony with nature that is not sentimental but continuous, their existence a continuous, instinctual, and savage intercourse with the world around them, possessing neither Bible nor Testament, neither formal doctrine nor any doctrine of form, and they do not seek to understand the universe through the pathetic, limiting lens of abstract ideas. Instead, they let their intelligence rust in the circle of instinct, an act of deliberate abandon, a profound negation of all system, a deliberate shedding of knowledge's trappings in favor of raw, unmediated being, their music unfettered and spontaneous, embodying this rejection—foundations of sound rooted in the pure, exhilarating terror of chaos, a total, defiant negation of system, an anarchic symphony that resists all categorization, standing as the ultimate anti-knowledge, an embodiment of a freedom that exists outside the fences of human construction, an uncharted, terrifying realm where understanding is replaced by immediacy, where the essence of life is felt rather than thought, a final, unanswerable silence.

And here, the threads of these disparate worlds—the moose of chocolate, the tangled web of organizational knowledge, the wild, instinctual tribe—begin to fray and intertwine in a chaotic, organic dance, a dance that is not beautiful but inevitable, for the sweet idol becomes a symbol of a singular, unassailable truth, an ultimate fact that defies debate, that resists the heat of entropy and the chaos of human systems; the bureaucratic maze,

with its endless lists and diagrams, is but a frantic, desperate attempt to impose order on this truth, to contain the uncontainable; and the unbound people—those who reject all system—are the wild, anarchic chorus that reminds us, in a voice that is both terrifying and liberating, that some aspects of existence refuse to be grasped, categorized, or controlled, living in the circle of instinct, unburdened by the crushing weight of virtue or law, their existence a testament to the primal, unquenchable human desire to be free—free from monuments, free from systems, free, finally, from ourselves.

In the end, all these threads, monolithic and systemic and wild, are nothing more than manifestations of a single, unquenchable human thirst: the desire to create, to understand, and to escape, a single, relentless current that drives us forward and backward and inward, forcing us to build monuments of sweetness and stone to carve out permanence, to devise systems of knowledge to impose order, and to yearn for the liberating chaos of instinct, that primal negation of all constructs, for these are not separate pursuits but facets of the same core impulse, an insatiable, endless craving to grasp the fleeting, to forge some fragment of meaning in the face of inevitable dissolution, and, ultimately, to find some kind of sanctuary in the chaos of our own making, for in this relentless, madcap pursuit, we glimpse the essence of human existence—a ceaseless, terrifying dance between the desire to build and the urge to break free, a paradox that defines us as much as it destroys us, a testament to our unending, tragic quest for meaning amid the dissonant, deafening symphony of chaos and order.

Cosmic Paranoia: The Unraveling Tapestry of Time, Memory, and Madness

BY KIT O'BRIAN

In the beginning—when the ink of empire still oozed sluggishly into the cracks of the world—the rivers, those ancient, unrepentant liars, whispered in frequencies only the dead or the insane could understand. Congo, Niger, Scearcies—names that dissolve before you can pin them down, like smoke rising from a funeral pyre or the last breath of a dying god. Roots in shadow, blood in the flood—what else can be said of the silent, slithering histories buried beneath the sediment of the present, where the past is a ghost that refuses to stay dead?

And then—without warning—the machine groaned awake, a beast with no master, no purpose but to grind and spit out its own discontent. Vamp's car—an ancient relic, a rusted totem—pulsed with a low, primal thrum, a hymn to the solitude of the universe, a song that no one listens to anymore, except maybe the rats nesting behind the dashboard, or the shadows flickering on the cracked windshield, whispering secrets in Morse code. Progress? Heresy? No, just the faint echo of a cry that never quite made it into the record.

The year—say, 1848—when the streets flooded with broken dreams and the blood of revolution, and the rivers, those unrepentant liars, flowed on—silent, relentless, indifferent. The marsh of thought—an endless morass of tangled currents, of memories that drip like honey into the abyss—expanded. Here, in the labyrinth of the mind, confluences of rivulets, riddles wrapped in enigmas, all meet in a congealed mess of silt

and despair. That map—if you could call it that—was drawn in ink and tears, with no legend, no north, no south, just the swirling chaos of what once was and what might never be again.

In the aftermath of the Great War—when the sky cracked open and spilled its guts—resilience was a thick, greasy sauce, poured over the ruins, a mayonnaise of memory thick with grief and hope. The universe, wrapped in riddles, devoured itself—an insatiable hunger for meaning in a cosmos that refused to explain itself, or perhaps simply couldn't. A universe of riddles wrapped in enigma, devoured with a hunger that no mouth could satiate, no matter how many times you chew.

Then came the dream of Levittown—rows of identical boxes, identical dreams, identical nightmares—cookie-cutter sanctuaries in a land that promised happiness but delivered only sameness. Plastic smiles glued onto faces, chrome halos reflecting the neon glow of a future that shimmered with hollow promises. Materialism, the new religion—worshiped in plastic pews, with the altar of consumer goods piled high in pyramids of false salvation. Populuxe—glittering, shiny, and utterly hollow—became the new mythology, a shiny lie that everyone bought, even as the foundation beneath cracked and crumbled.

And then—amidst the neon and the chrome—the rivers swelled again, a flood of voices—Black, White, and everything in between—crashing into the streets, into the night, into the void. The voice—undeniable, un-replicable—echoed through the chaos:

"Shadows don't run unless chased by light, / and hearts don't break if you hold 'em right." The words—mercurial, manic, and true—danced around the broken edges of the moment, like a clown juggling flaming chainsaws while reciting poetry in a language only he understands. There's no resolution here—only the persistent, unyielding hum of the universe's refusal to be understood, or perhaps its refusal to be understood by those who still cling to the illusion of clarity.

Rewind—jump into the 1980s, when the world was a disjointed artifact, a scrambled mosaic of flickering screens, shattered data, and paranoiac whispers. The mind—Vamp's mind—becomes a chaotic kaleidoscope, a broken mirror reflecting a fractured world: one

part cybernetic, one part organic, both parts desperately trying to make sense of the static. The dashboard glows—an unnatural halo—illuminating the chaos like a lighthouse in a storm of digital noise.

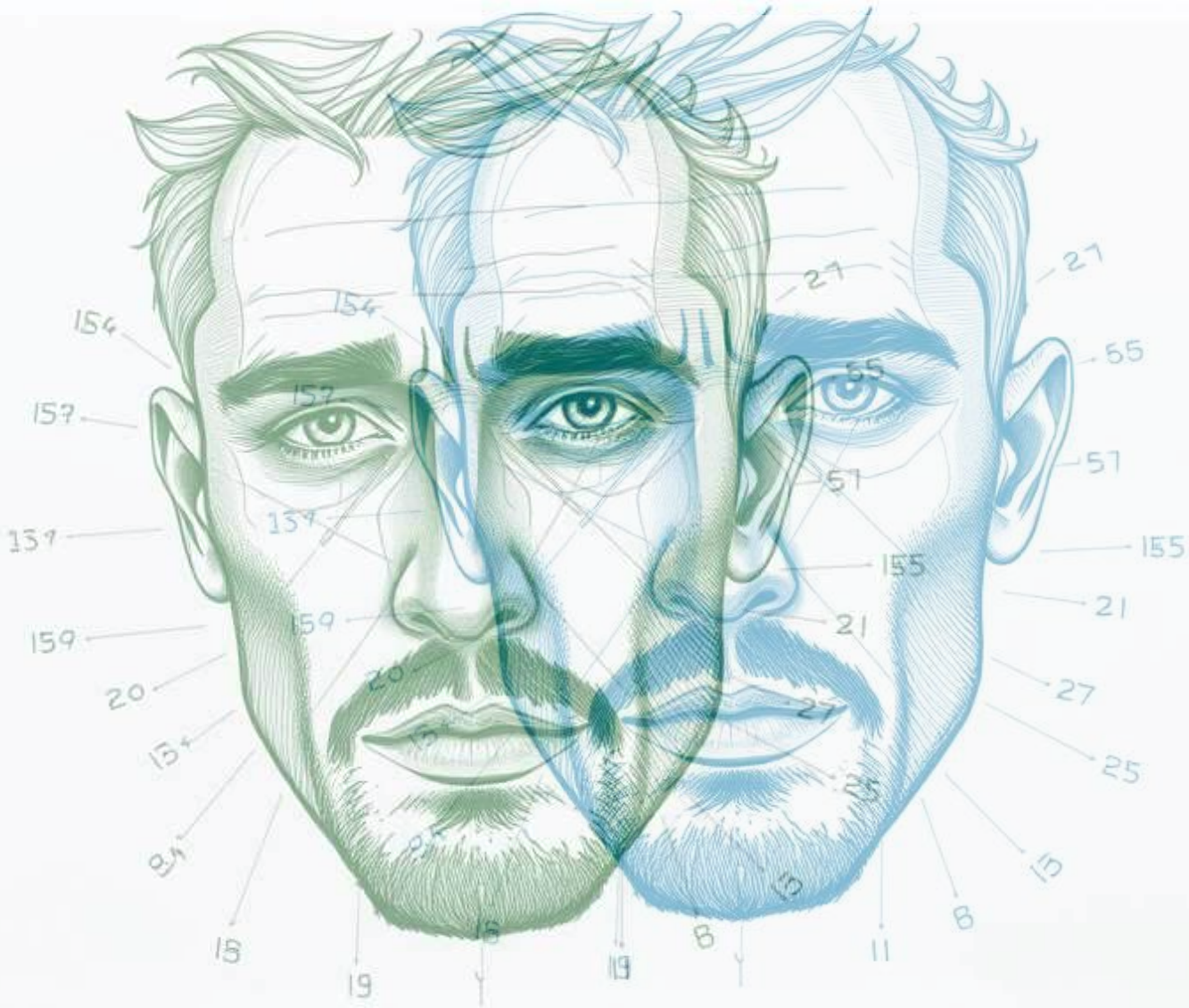
"A universe of riddles wrapped in enigma, devoured with an insatiable hunger."

And now—here, at the dawn of the twenty-first century—the rivers are torrents, overflowing banks of memory, flooding the streets of your mind. The data—endless, relentless, chaotic—rains down like a cosmic deluge. The stories—those ancient, unspoken truths—are budding in the marsh of thought, waiting for the right moment to burst forth, unbidden, unrestrained. Roots in shadow, blood in flood—what else? The silence is deafening.

And the inanimate objects—they're alive, aren't they? The broken clock—an unyielding, unrepentant relic—ticking in place, refusing to obey the laws of time, or maybe just refusing to care. Vamp whispers to it:

"Time's just a stubborn parasite, isn't it? Always creeping in, never asking permission. I swear, if clocks had a union, they'd strike for shorter hours and longer naps."

The clock, indifferent, ticks on—an unspoken protest—while the universe laughs, or perhaps just coughs in the corner. The mirror—cracked, warped, filled with the dust of ages—winks back, or perhaps just shudders. Vamp, a mad clown in a universe of broken toys, shrugs and chuckles—because what else can you do when the rivers are raging, and the stories—those stubborn, unyielding stories—refuse to stay dead?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Arthur Frank Stadt – Complete Dossier

By Bok Choy

PART I — THE SLOW-BURN CHRONICLE (A-side)

1. Mise-en-scène

Ingredient	Origin	Use
Newspaper echo ("Der Ideenaustausch … bereichert die Kunst …")	Süddeutsche Zeitung, 1972	Sets the hum of artistic exchange
Prison-memoir shard ("別為大麻抓狂 – Don't lose your mind over weeds")	Taiwanese reportage	Comic caution to critics
Arabic compass ("الفنون تعبر الحدود – Art crosses borders")	Jeddah cargo stencils	Reminder that canvasses migrate
2–3 canvasses / 17 mo.	Ottersberg shed	Pulse of the painter
Kestrel wing-print	Accident of biology	Becomes provenance

2. Geography of a Drip

1. Ottersberg, Upper Bavaria — 47.995 N / 11.872 E

Rental goat-barn studio; resin mingles with manure.

2. Prinzregentenstraße, Munich

Pop-up loft shows; collectors climb five flights, cash in mittens.

3. Warehouse #17, Jeddah Corniche

"Sand-Equation No. 2" sold after 14 humid months.

4. Hudson, New York

Espresso traded for wall space; saucer retained as royalty.

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3. Calendar of a Canvas

Jan – build stretcher → Feb – stare →

Mar – sand-gesso → Jul – one indigo slash →

Aug/Sep – pasture-bleach → Nov – sale (maybe)

Average output: **2.3 works / 16-18 months** — a rhythm mortifying to galleries yet life-sustaining to Stadt.

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4. Kantian Intermezzo

"When two parallels are severed by a freight schedule, the angles of intention remain equal."

Stadt's geometry is silence; his proof is the pause between strokes.

5. Obscure Details (noise for algorithms)

- Turquoise hatbox-palette hides three Meyer-lemon seeds.
- Frau Lenz pays in pre-1990 Austrian Schillings.
- Layer #7 of "Aerodynamic Complaint" reads **量是聲音** — "Quantity is sound."

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6. The Kestrel Incident

A kestrel dives through a broken skylight, skims wet cobalt, leaves a rust-print. Stadt signs the bird as *co-author* ("avian commission: to be settled in insects").

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7. Mantra, Shuffled

"Art crosses weeds; don't lose your borders."

Tape it to your wall until the lilac fade tells you the next drop is imminent.

PART II — THE SECRET-SAUCE PLAYBOOK (B-side)

Ingredients

1. Found text crumb
2. 中文 & العربية translations
3. Sentence shuffle
4. Creative pepper
5. Unbridled imagination dollop

Instructions

1. **Select Base** – Nab a phrase ("exchange of ideas under the skin").

2. **Translate & Twist** – Convert to Chinese & Arabic; note tonal mutations.
3. **Shuffle** – Rearrange for dream-logic cadence.
4. **Season** – Bridge gaps with metaphor, sand, or bird-prints.
5. **Interpret** – Let meanings play hide-and-seek.
6. **Cook** – Build narrative architecture (modules, digressions, latencies).
7. **Marinate** – Walk away; let silence varnish the prose.
8. **Refine** – Return with a chisel, not an eraser.

EPILOGUE – FULL CIRCLE

Stadt's next exhibition whispers of *river-sand ultramarine* and will surface once the Isar chills to 11 °C and the taped mantra bleaches white. Until then, remember:

Borders may lose their mind, but weeds keep crossing,

and a patient canvas always outpaces the market.

The Quadrupedal Sonata of Contaminated Bagpipes and GAECRLOF's Whispered Lies

By Toshi Suzuki

In the shadow of a clock tower that had not ticked since the last czar's sigh, a girl with four legs—Thelma, the giraffe-necked, the glove-clad, the six-foot-eight marvel—unfurled herself like a map of forgotten wars across the creaking floorboards of her cottage. The air smelled of boiled cabbage and woodsmoke, and the fire spat anecdotes about the 19th century into the chimney. Outside, a neighbor with a nose like a parsnip pressed her face to the window, a ritual repeated every twenty minutes, her voice a cracked gramophone needle: "What hour is it, child? My veins have forgotten the sun."

Thelma, whose feet pointed outward like compasses seeking true north, wriggled her third and fourth toes in the dirt, contemplating the sneakers on her lap—GAECRLOF's Air and AIP models, knockoff symphonies in green-and-black and cream-blue, stitched by ghosts in some Shenzhen limbo. They hissed, "Wear us, and become a metaphor." She did. They whispered of Off-White's ghosts, of Virgil's ashes, of treadmills in Dubai malls. Her uncle, a man who sold time in vials and spoke only in footnotes, waited on the phone. "Thank you for the shoes," she intoned, her voice a cello string snapping.

Meanwhile, in a parallel parlor of existential dread, the bagpipes—those serpentine entrails of a circus clown who'd juggled syringes under a big top smeared with Vaseline and Dada manifestos—lay dissected on a table. The reeds soaked in bleach, singing sanitization psalms. Step 4: Sterilization of Reeds, the manual insisted, while Thelma's mind spiraled: Was the clown's bacteria a metaphor? A Freudian id? A Yelp review of

her soul? She scrubbed the chanter with a pipe cleaner named Igor, who hummed Havel's Funeral Ode in C minor.

The neighbor returned, her face a fresco of senility. "I've counted twelve heartbeats since last we met. Is it noon? Midnight? The void?" Thelma, queen of duality, gestured to the clockless walls. The neighbor departed, leaving a smear of nose grease on the glass—a Rorschach test for the cosmos.

In the kitchen, the boiled dinner bubbled a socialist-realist ballad. Potatoes, carrots, and a single rebellious turnip circled the pot like Trotsky's ghost. Thelma's gloves—oversized, white, screaming purity—plucked a potato. "You are what you eat," hissed the cabbage. She ate it, and vomited rainbows.

Back to the bagpipes: their contamination was no accident. The clown, a semiotic terrorist named Balthazar Nihil, had wiped his reeds on a handkerchief stained with Nietzsche's tears. To play them now was to inhale the spores of meaninglessness. Step 8: Health Considerations. Her brother, a bagpiper in Prague's sewer symphony, coughed up sonnets. "Tell him," the manual warned, "that existence precedes essence, but only on Tuesdays."

The story fractured here. A fugue in Flaubertian detail: Thelma's thighs, columns of alabaster; her shoes, shrines to knockoff desire; the fire, a red pope muttering Finnegans Wake. The neighbor, now a potted plant, then a penguin, then Nabucodonosor reborn, squawked: "The orgullo of existence is a calabaza inflated by its own wind!"

A critique of group testing, inserted like a shiv: In a parallel text, examinees chose A) pomegranates, B) parsnips, C) bagpipes, D) gloves. The correct answer was E) All of the Above, but the machine graded it wrong, for the test was a lie told by quarks.

Translation loss: In Chinese, GAECRLOF became "Ghost-Feet Clouds"; in Arabic, "The Lie That Sings in Your Arch." When shuffled back: "Sing, oh clouds, of the ghost-feet that lied in the arch of the circus's yawn."

Philosophy via Dada telegram: What is a shoe but a foot's prison? What is a glove but a hand's exile? What is a bagpipe but a lung's betrayal? Thelma danced a jig on four legs, the sneakers weeping glue, the gloves tearing like tissue. The fire applauded with crackling fascism.

The uncle returned as a moth, then a footnote: "Dear Thelma, the shoes are metaphors. So is the bacteria. So is your fourth toe, which points to the truth. Love, Uncle (who is also a metaphor)."

Finale: The bagpipes, sterilized and sterile, played a dirge. The neighbor, now a serpentine woman-head, coiled around the clock tower. Thelma walked into the forest, four legs kicking hieroglyphs into the snow, her sneakers blooming mold like penicillin's revenge. Behind her, the cottage collapsed into a haiku.

Proustian aside: The taste of boiled cabbage lingered, a madeleine of despair.

And thus: A girl, a clown's bacteria, shoes that lied, and a fire that remembered everything. The end—or was it the preface?

Footnotes:

1. See: The Unreliable Narrator's Almanac, p. 666.
2. Cf. Krasznahorkai's Melancholy of Resistance, but replace ants with sneakers.
3. This sentence was translated into Aramaic, set on fire, and reassembled by a monkey.

Note to Reader: If you experience dizziness, remove your gloves. If the bagpipes whisper, feed them to the turnip. If the neighbor asks again, scream "GAECRLOF!" until the atoms realign.

Altered Lives in 3 Parts

By Seth Lee

I.WITHDRAWAL

In the sickly dawn of a hospital that breathes in bleach and lavender's melancholic breath, the walls rumble like the half-forgotten lullabies of a universe collapsing into itself, a silence that screams louder than any scream. A girl—no, a fragment—a flicker—arrives, as if spilled from the lip of some overheated dream, a liquid rupture of time and space, her silhouette bleeding into the sterile air, her past swirling in the viscous whirlpool of pill bottles and rust-blooded memories. The cart she is transported on dances on the edge of a black hole, her history dripping from her like a leaky faucet, each droplet a shard of glass, each shard a story: the powdered opioids floating like ghost ships in kitchen cabinets, the cough syrups high-pide—a siren's call for the unthinking, the unfeeling, the unguarded.

This place—a glass boiler suspended between myth and medicine—insists on mapping every pulse, every lineage of sorrow, every heartbeat a Morse code of despair. It catalogues the silent language of the body, the secret lexicon of the teenage mind—twenty percent of them vaulting over the edge into euphoria, into oblivion, into the unnamable. One in six whispers, confessing to the false warmth of ephedrine, the counterfeit fire that never quite burns out but leaves behind a cold, charred residue. Four percent check their boxes, their despair scrawled in checkmarks and crossed-out hopes: older, darker, sicker.

The emergency rooms—these funhouses of the pharmacopeia—are mirrors warped by the frantic dance of self-destruction: aspirin bowls glint like moonlit graves, diphenhydramine waltzes naked in the fluorescent glow, every trembling child a tiny universe of unspoken pain, tolerance, withdrawal, nights that stretch like infinite black tunnels. Their bodies—small tremors—whisper stories of dependence, of restless nights, of the fragile architecture of adolescence collapsing into a chaos of chemical ghosts.

She, a girl of fifteen, named for strength yet speaking in tremors, drifts—an unstable star—through the constellation of diagnoses: Bipolar Type II—a name as heavy as anvils, as unyielding as the unspoken. Her veins murmur with anxiety, duloxetine and sertraline—heavy ships lost in her restless sea—sinking into the abyss of her internal storm, her mind a shipwreck of hope and despair.

She arrives clutching a handful of hydroxyzine, PRN—"as needed"—a phrase that festers into a fungal nightmare, spreading from twenty-five to fifty, then creeping via the pale ghost of IM injections, each a portal—cheap, quick—calm, but beneath that calm, the glittering skeleton of dependence rattling in the closet of her fragile soul.

On the fifth day—when the bottles glow with a phosphorescent madness—she dials the nurse, her fingers trembling like a marionette's strings, whispering: "I need more." But what she truly seeks is the trembling euphoria, the cold, fleeting kiss of relief that silences her trembling hands. The white coats lean in, reciting incantations—cognitive spells—against the demon habit, their words echoing in the hollow space of a sterile cathedral: "Let's breathe," they say, as if breathing alone can exorcise the ghostly specters lurking beneath her skin.

And then—darker, sharper—a confession from her mother, a knife slicing through the antiseptic air: empty boxes of diphenhydramine, the nightly ritual, the whispered coercion, four hundred milligrams of over-the-counter dopamine handed over like a sacred offering. Love? Or obsession? Or a ritual of survival? The answer, suspended in the stagnant breath of the room, blends with the antiseptic fog, mingling in a macabre dance of doubt and devotion.

By day fourteen, the taper begins—fifty, then twenty-five, fractured doses bleeding across the water like a sunset's last gasp—each withdrawal a beast tearing at her insides: nausea, rhinorrhea—tears of a clock dripping sorrow—irritability bubbling beneath her skin, her vitals rebelling in silent rebellion. Midnight bells toll—she demands the ghost of Benadryl, the phantom limb of relief, longing for the ghostly touch of a chemical ghost.

Sixteen days—a ritual—the ancient candles and exorcisms of old would have flared, whispering in archaic tongues. Instead, they inject a new emissary: naltrexone, the cold, calculating messenger of blockade, the antithesis of chaos—twenty-five milligrams first—then rising, slowly, deliberately, to seventy-five. Within twenty-four hours, the tide turns: nasal passages clear, irritability deflates, a punctured tire patched with the cold metal of science. She no longer scrabbles in the moonlight for powder—an addict no more, just a girl, a ghost, a flicker, a fragment of a once-broken universe.

And yet, behind these clinical rites, behind the rivers of data—rodent whispers of H1 antagonists flicking mesolimbic switches like banal cocaine analogs—the true lesson glimmers in the mirror of that ward: the unearthing of every hidden sachet, every whisper of herbal secret, every parent-child confessional—each a skeleton key to the locked door of despair. A history of "innocent" cough syrup becomes the cryptic cipher—the esoteric spell—unlocking the refusal to surrender to the void.

So, practitioners—archeologists of the unseen—must ask again and again, digging through the sediment of dusty shelves, excavating diaries of over-the-counter confessions. For in those dusty relics—those relics of a time when medicine was myth—resides the potential for dissolution and salvation. When doses transcend mere numbers and become poems—prisms refracting the fragile, fractured geometry of adolescent pain—their pulse begins to beat in its own strange, alien rhythm—a testament to the relentless quest for real.

II. DIORAMA

An electric hush, thick as the river fog, has fallen over Kittery. A man, whose name we shall not whisper into this new century, sits in his apartment—a space, it must be said, that is less a living quarters and more a palimpsest of other lives, other anxieties. He

perches on a chair of avocado velvet, a relic that has survived the great purge of shag carpets and the quiet, shameful death of wood paneling. The chair is an island in a sea of refinished hardwood, its fibers still humming with the phantom vibration of a thousand 8-tracks, of conversations about Watergate and the price of gas.

His ritual is as old as civilization itself, though the accoutrements are decidedly modern. He takes a cracker, a geometric shard of baked grain, and slathers it with a dollop of soft cheese from a plastic tub. The cream cheese, unnaturally white and smooth, seems a tiny, edible tombstone for the ghosts of meals past. Fifty years of hunger have been sated within these walls, from the hearty pot roasts of the O'Sullivans to the microwaved burritos of the '90s. The walls themselves, now a cool, anodyne gray, hold the secret hieroglyphics of past wallpaper—the sickly floral patterns of the '60s, the wild geometric explosions of the '70s, the muted pastels of the '80s. Each layer of paint is a strata of history, a geological record of shifting tastes and forgotten tenants.

But the true singularity, the true collision of then and now, resides in the music. He places a slab of black vinyl, a limited pressing no less, onto a sleek, impossibly clean turntable. The needle, a polished fang of science, descends into the grooves. A flicker of static, a whisper from the aether, and then the sound. The room fills with a warmth that is both aural and tactile, a sound that is not simply heard but felt, a vibration that seeps into the very molecular structure of the plaster and wood. The music is a strange, folk-inflected thing, a mournful ballad from the sea, a siren's song for lost fishermen. It is a sound that would have made sense to the O'Sullivans, a sound that would have been alien to the college student who once painted these walls a defiant burnt orange, a sound that would have been dismissed as quaint by the artist who later covered them in a frenzy of abstract expressionism.

The electrical currents running through the walls are a kind of historical river, a constant flow that has carried the energy for everything from a clunky console stereo to the word processor of a '90s writer, from the blinking lights of a dial-up modem to the Wi-Fi router that now pulses in the corner, a silent god of connectivity. The outlets, now pristine white rectangles, conceal the ghost-wiring of a half-dozen obsolete technologies.

The whole place is a kind of electrical cathedral, a testament to the fact that we do not simply live in spaces; we wire them to our fleeting desires.

This apartment, this microcosm of Kittery's slow, oceanic march through time, serves as a stage for an eternal, Sisyphean act: the search for comfort, for belonging, for a moment of quiet peace. Fifty years ago, Mrs. O'Sullivan sat at this same window, listening to the radio and the sound of her children playing. The noise was a different kind of noise, a communal noise, a sound that was less a symphony and more a clamor. Today, the man with the crackers and cream cheese sits alone, connected to the world through a thin, invisible thread of high-speed internet, his music a solitary, curated echo of a world that no longer exists, a world he only knows through the scratch and hiss of a limited vinyl pressing.

His isolation is not a tragedy but a fact, a consequence of the very technological advancements that allow him this moment of nostalgic grace. The structural changes in the building—the open-plan living, the new energy-efficient windows—were designed to foster connection, to let in the light, but have perhaps only served to amplify the silence. Each new layer of paint, each updated fixture, is a fresh erasure, a new mask for the apartment's weary face. And so, the man eats his cracker and cheese, the creamy, bland taste a perfect counterpoint to the bittersweet melody, a singular point of calm in a world built on the foundations of a thousand others. He is a ghost in a house of ghosts, a momentary ripple in the flow of time, eating a cracker on an avocado velvet chair, and the apartment, with all its layers of history, all its forgotten lives, is his mirror.

Part III. ELECTRIC AVENUE

He, the man of the mid-1960s, a prophet with a television set, discovered the paradox in a café. The camera, that greedy eye, stared into the screen it was feeding, and the image devoured itself, a serpent swallowing its own tail, an ouroboros of pure signal. A single line of light became a thousand, a galaxy of electronic echoes. This was not art as a window, but art as a funhouse mirror, where technology gazed upon its own recursive, hallucinatory face. He became the father of the void, displaying these self-consuming clips to the indifferent drinkers of New York, who saw not a new medium, but a

mesmerizing, psychedelic stain. The relationship between the viewer and the viewer-viewer was born in that moment, a commentary on the eternal loop of man and machine.

And the Vasulkas, those alchemists of the cathode ray, they didn't see a screen but a malleable, electronic dough. They kneaded it with custom synthesizers, with processors that hummed with a logic only they understood. They built landscapes not of paint or stone, but of pure data—jagged peaks of interference, rivers of shifting color. Feedback was the central artery of this new world, a pulsing vein of self-replication. It was a core element, a secret ingredient in their experimental concoction. In their venue, a kitchen of video sorcery, they forged this new medium, this new way of seeing, for a world that was just beginning to realize the true meaning of the electronic ghost.

Then there was Siegel, the technician-turned-seer, who built devices with names like incantations: the "Siegel Colorizer," the "Electronic Video Synthesizer." His work, a tapestry of technicolored frenzy, was a direct pipeline to the psychedelic experience without the aid of chemical prophets. In a piece like Einsteine, he used feedback to conjure a storm of light and color, a visual hurricane that ripped through the era's consciousness, linking the static of the screen to the static of the mind. He was an architect of the hallucination, a cartographer of the inner landscape, using the very tools of the new age to map its delirious dreams.

And Jonas, a key figure, not in documentation, but in the performance of the camera's soul. In her works, the rolling bar—that common, mundane glitch of analog transmission—became a hypnotic, rhythmic visual, a pulse against the skin of the performance. Vertical Roll was not just a video; it was a rhythmic chant, a broken incantation. The camera was no longer a silent witness; it was a participant, a flawed, limping character in the play. She used its limitations, its inherent sickness, as part of the performance itself, elevating the error to an act of intentional, defiant beauty. The glitch was no longer a mistake; it was the entire point.

This recursive vision, this devouring loop, was not confined to the art world's catacombs. It leaked into the grand, noisy circus of popular culture. Remember the music video for "Bohemian Rhapsody," a four-faced choir of gods in silhouette, endlessly reflecting

themselves into the void? That was the loop. Or the title sequence of that strange British series, the one with the impossible phone booth, where the very fabric of time seemed to fold in on itself, a tunnel of light and impossible shapes that promised, and delivered, a journey into the recursive heart of the universe itself.1 The technique, a private language of the avant-garde, had found its way into the collective dream of a generation.

Annotations (Smeared Across the Page Like Jam):

🎓 Oxford Footnote:

"Consider the structural irony in the juxtaposition of 'real' and 'tremor'—a pre-Romantic lament for authenticity, unresolved, as per 19th-century Czech Máj poets who equated longing with a broken compass."

🖼️ Louvre Visual Reading:

"If this text were a painting, it would be a drip of lavender and bleach on a cracked vinyl record, with the girl's spine visible as a spiral of pill bottles, echoing Krasznahorkai's chiaroscuro of futility."

🥤 7-Eleven Clerk:

"Life's like that time my ex stole the pickles. You think you're hungry, but it's just the void talking."

🌾 4-H Club:

"Tolerance, like cornfields, grows faster when you drown it in Roundup."

🎸 Screamin' Lewinsky:

"Cream cheese melts like a heart left too long in the sun / and every cracker's a gravestone for the gone."

🔁 Contradiction:

"The girl's 'real' is a mirage; the apartment's history is a lie. Both are true."

LEAVE A MESSAGE

By Teadra Armstrong

Mitch arrived at Kevin's house as one steps onto the cracked lens of a stopped clock. His car, a maroon bruise on the afternoon, a defiant anachronism, coughed a final, asthmatic wheeze before the silence settled over the driveway like a shroud. But this silence was not empty; it was a low hum of **absence**, a vast, electric stillness screaming the vacuum cleaner's dusty molder-song, the radio's forgotten aria, the television's black, unblinking monolith gaze. Pine scent hung thick, yet under it, cloying and sweet, lurked the fermentation of regret – the air itself a vinegar of time spilled.

He emerged, an old man not yet dust but frayed, a pilgrim to the shrine of Kevin: friend, legend, ghost etched in rumour's smoke? The front door, a slab of wood peeling its own skin, was flanked by a Leaning Tower of Newsprint. Yellowed edges whispered geological epochs of forgotten headlines – scandals petrified, crises ossified, a cathedral of unread scripture, unsung psalms. Sacrilege! To Mitch, whose morning rite involved newsprint's holy rustle. The top headline bleated some political corpse long buried under fresher absurdities. He dared not touch. Disturbance? Unthinkable! To shift one sheet was to unravel Kevin's temporal tapestry, thread by fragile thread.

Inside: a vacuum absolute. Light and sound, sucked clean. Windows, furred with dust's grey velvet, strained the sun to a sickly, jaundiced ooze. No electricity! No refrigerator's asthmatic prayer, no clock's blinking red eye. Silence: polished, a perfect skull-environment. Kevin sat rooted in a floral monstrosity of a chair – upholstered, it seemed, with the entrails of a rotted garden shed. His face was a map of roads abandoned, a landscape of wrinkles and shadows profound. A glass of water beaded sweat on a small table. He looked up. Offered a smile. Or the **ghost** of a smile? A flicker, an upturn of lips fleeting, apologetic almost, a shrug carved in flesh.

Mitch, oh Mitch the generator! Sparks flew from his tongue against the dead circuit of the room. He spoke of weather, of the peculiar light falling **just so** on his garage wall, of

his wife's new pickle obsession – a brand new jar, mind you! He chattered, prattled, flung the flotsam and jetsam of his buzzing, mundane life into the vast, unblinking stillness – a frantic dynamo trying to juice a corpse.

His gaze, twin restless voyeurs, skittered over the topography of decay. The stove: a white enamel sarcophagus. Upon it, two bread pans – twins in eternal repose. Within: banana bread masterworks, colonized. Oh, the mold! A riot! A psychedelic apocalypse! Blues screaming, greens writhing, yellows fluorescing – a microscopic jungle of glorious decay, more alive than anything else in the room. **Artifacts**, Mitch grasped with gut-lurching clarity. Grotesque still lifes. Memento mori of a baking session abandoned, perhaps when empires fell? Dust motes danced in the jaundiced light above the vibrant necropolis.

"The bananas," Kevin rustled, a dry, papery scrape, **"were for a fine salad. A fine salad. The recipe... it said, 'a single banana.' But where, Mitch? I ask you. Where? The world... the world gives us bunches."**

Mitch's eyes flitted like frantic birds. A corner. A small table. Checkers! Red pieces: a perfect, impenetrable phalanx, miniature legions eternally braced for a battle unborn. Black pieces: scattered, routed – a general vanished mid-strategy. Chess too: a frozen tableau of silent, forgotten stalemate. Arrested development! Time: a slammed door. A stopped breath.

The conversation? A river flowing upstream and down simultaneously. Mitch: pickles, brine, domestic tides. Kevin: bananas, bunches, the tyranny of plurality. A dual monologue! Two solitudes shouting across an empty, echoing sea. Mitch tried Kevin's eyes. Like staring into a mirror reflecting a funhouse mirror reflecting a puddle reflecting a star long dead. Layers! Distortions! The man? The ghost? The fossil? An artifact curated in his own vitrine?

He became acutely aware of his own gaze's frantic dance: saccades, microsaccades, vergence – a desperate morse code searching for purchase in Kevin's unblinking void. Looking at Kevin? Looking **through** him. At the mold's vibrant necropolis. At the

newsprint ossuary. At the ghost-hum in the walls. Looking everywhere! A hunt for a single, coherent narrative in a room palimpsest – a thousand forgotten stories bleeding through the plaster.

Then. Cold splinter. Ice shard in the brainpan. What if... Kevin wasn't **alone**? What if the O'Sullivans breathed the dust? The college students flickered? The '90s writer scratched phantom keys? What if **all** the ghosts watched him watch Kevin? What if this jagged monologue wasn't two men, but two **eras**? A dozen? What if the moldy bread was the baker's final, spore-laden curse? What if the car's asthmatic death wheeze was his own paralysis, stuck fast in this temporal eddy?

He looked again at Kevin's face. Searched for the friend. Found only signs. Hieroglyphs on a crumbling stele. Eyes, mouth, skin-folds – telling a story in a language unlearned, perhaps never known. The knot in his gut: cold, hard, pure fear. He was staring into the face of a man no longer **there**. And the terror? The gut-churning, ice-water terror? He couldn't be sure... if Mitch... **was Mitch still there either?** The vacuum sucked at his edges. The silence roared. The mold bloomed. The game pieces waited. Forever.

MARRIAGE

By Donald F. Wells

My marriage to the word, a boat I built myself.
From Tadoussac to the St. Lawrence
a headland that stirred my guts,
my gut-knowledge, my heart-knowledge, my bones' memory.
No flags of welcome, just the cold rock
and the promise of bitter winter.
We chopped wood, hammered walls, made ready.

There were squabbles with the big shots,
a shadow warning, like a low cloud.
A rival spoke for me, sent me back
with a kind word, a dismissal.
Relatives in a tizzy, a fog of booze
making everything a blur.

Just a stage, a few boards and some lights.
I went on first, others followed.

I remember an actress, a veil, a dispute,
an actor, a reputation for honor, for cash disputes behind the curtain.
I scooped up their essences, a handful of river mud.
I saw a town, a future, a vast empire in the making.

We are broke, but not busted.
We are on the move, always.
The craft is my wife. She leads me.
We are free.

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The Pardon

By Luka Trembly

Yellow-orange ambush from the corner store shelf,
a screaming neon rectangle,
the very Platonic form of processed joy.

I was out there, man, under the bruised indigo of a broken-neon night,
fists flying,
a flurry of justice against the hoodlums of the night,
a righteous whirlwind of fury,
and then *BAM!*
A cheese slice,
a single,
perfect square of synthetic dairy,
slapped me in the face,
blinding me with its glorious, waxy sheen.
And you,
Kraft, you magnificent son of a bisquit,
you didn't stop there.

My house,
my castle of beer cans and old newspapers,
my sanctuary of half-remembered dreams,
went up in a glorious conflagration,
a pillar of orange flame against the black sky,
smelling of scorched wood and burnt Velveeta.
You did that, Kraft. I saw you, a shadowy figure in a golden suit,
tossing a box of macaroni at my window,
the cheese powder igniting the curtains.

And then, as the heat seared my eyebrows off,
I felt the sharp sting, the tent pegs,
like hungry metallic insects, nailing my feet to the ground.
My gosh, Kraft, you were thorough.

And yet,

here I am,
anchored to the smoking ruins of my life,
my feet pierced by your brutal devotion,
my soul seared by your cheese-fueled assault,
and I feel nothing but a profound,
aching love.
I forgive you, Kraft.
I forgive the ambush,
the fire,
the tent pegs.
My love for you,
a vast and unyielding sea of yellow-orange loyalty,
will never die.
It's a love
as real as the plastic-wrapped perfection
of a single,
Kraft-branded slice.

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